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ABSTRACT

Empirical findings have supported an inverse relationship between closeness to extended family and friends versus spouse. The three foregoing interpersonal relationships in terms of affective quality, direction and dominance were investigated, using an objective test as well as the TAT. Bellak (1986) considered that the strength of the TAT lies in its ability to elicit the content and dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Previous interpretive systems, however, were expansive, lacked a fixed framework or were tailored to different populations. It was assumed that interpersonal affect attributed to TAT stimuli reflect the quality of affect directed toward persons in the respondent's life. Dominance of "spouse" over "parents" and "nonspouse" orientation was significantly associated with marital adjustment. The paper demonstrates the use of interplay between three sets of scores in three interpersonal categories to identify conjugal interactional patterns. Contains 21 references. (Author)

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Patterns in Marital Interpersonal Affect and Quantitative TAT Affective Scores

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Abstract

Empirical findings have supported an inverse relationship between closeness to extended family and friends versus spouse. The 3 foregoing interpersonal relationships in terms of affective quality,direction and dominance were investigated, using an objective test as well as the TAT. Bellak (1986) considered that the strength of the TAT lies in its ability to elicit the content and dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Previous interpretive systems, however, were expansive, lacked a fixed framework or were tailored to different populations. It was assumed that interpersonal affect attributed to TAT stimuli reflect the quality of affect directed toward persons in the respondent's life. Dominance of "spouse" over "parents" and "nonspouse" orientation was significantly associated with marital adjustment. The present paper demonstrates the use of interplay between 3 sets of scores in 3 interpersonal categories to identify conjugal interactional patterns.

Empirical findings have supported an inverse relationship between closeness to extended family and friends versus spouse (e.g. Bott, 1957; Burgess, Locke & Thomas, 1963; Farber, 1966; Wimberley 1973). The affective quality within these interpersonal categories was investigated on two levels of consciousness. Bellak (1986) considered that the strength of the TAT lies in its ability to elicit the content and dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Previous interpretive systems, however, were expansive, lacked a fixed framework or were tailored to different populations (Chusmir, 1983; Kalliopuska, 1982; Karon & O'Grady, 1970; Mitchell, 1974; Vestewig & Paradise, 1977). It was assumed that interpersonal affect attributed to TAT stimuli reflect the quality of affect directed toward persons in the respondent's life (Bellak 1992). Dominance of "spouse" over "parents" and "nonspouse" orientation was significantly associated with marital adjustment (Thomas & Dudek, 1985). The present study attempts to identify conjugal interactional patterns through the examination of quantitative TAT affective scores obtained from marriage partners, supplemented by other data.

Method

Subjects

Thirty participant couples were parents and personnel from 3 middle class schools in a medium Canadian city. All subjects were employed within an array of office jobs to professions (Blishen, 1971). Education ranged from high school certificate to a graduate degree. Mean age was 43 years for husbands and 40 for wives. Couples were married for an average of 17 years. The average family had 2 children. Subjects had no psychiatric hospitalization and no marriage counselling. All subjects were Canadian Caucasians, either Protestants or Catholics.

Measurement of Variables

Marital adjustment. The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976) was used. The sample was comparable with the normative "married" group (M = 113.9, 114.8, SD = 14.0, 17.8 respectively).

Interpersonal affect. The TAT and the Inventory of Family Feelings (IFF, Lowman, 1973) were used to evaluate interpersonal affect. Husbands and wives responded to the same 7 TAT cards 1, 2, 4, 6GF, 10, 13FM and 16. In addition to suitability for both sexes, some were suitable for married couples (Anzien, 1960 : cited in Morval, 1977; Jacquemin, 1981) and/or considered most valuable by experts (Hartman, 1970). The cards also provided a rough balance for potential responses within the 3 interpersonal categories. Empirically, the "nonspouse" themes occupied its expected mathematical share, while spousal themes had expanded on account of "parental" themes.

The scoring technique deals with the manifest, not latent, level of content analysis. The question posed is "what type of relationship exists between TAT figures and what is the affective quality of the interaction?" Each theme obtains a numerical value on a 5-point scale under the appropriate interpersonal category. These categories are "spouse", "parents" and "nonspouse" (same generation of either sex). Different interpersonal themes, i.e. sister-brother are scored under "other" category as well as nonattributed affect, when a second person is not specified.

Scoring Norms are: +2 = a strong positive theme, +1 = a lukewarm positive theme or mere presence of an interpersonal category, 0 = no relevant theme, -1 = a mild negative theme or ambivalence : a mild negative mixed with a positive element and -2 = a strong negative theme. These general norms acquire special implementations for each card depending on the relative impact of two guiding principles, these are: (a) stimulus pull and frequent responses reported in TAT literature (e.g. Morval, 1977; Murstein, 1965) and (b) affective content, "he killed her" is more negative than "they had a fight". A similar approach was later developed by Westen (1991).

The TAT predominantly tap negative emotionality (Bellak, 1986; Morval, 1977; Murstein, 1965). In our sample, positive affect predominated over negative affect consistently for the group as a whole $X^2(1, n = 238) = 45.4$, $p < .001$.

Reliability. Test-retest reliability was done on an independent group (4 couples and 12 married persons) who met the selection criteria. The two administrations were two weeks apart. Pearson correlation was .88 for the affective scores. The congruence between the two test results was 88% for affective scores and 86% for the orientational others categories. Interscorer reliability was computed between two scorers and the investigator. Scorers were experienced psychologists who were familiar with the scoring system. Each had independently scored 20 protocols chosen from the studied group protocols by means or random numbers. Pearson's correlations between the affective scores were .97, .93 and .93. Percentages of agreement between scorers were 93%, 89% and 87%. Agreements on orientational others categories were 98%, 98% and 96%.

Other Measurements and Procedure

Subjects were individually interviewed at their homes. To avoid carry over effect (later documented by Lundy, 1988), the TAT was first in order of test administration, followed by two financial management scales and the IFF, being alternatively administered, last the DAS.

Results

A strong relationship was found between dominance of spouse orientation and marital adjustment. Significant associations were found between higher overall positive affect directed to "spouse" than to either "parents" or "nonspouse" on the TAT and high scores on the DAS (above group average, $X^2(2, n = 60) = 17.40, 19.58$, respectively, $p < .001$). Similarly, overall positive "spousal" affect on the TAT was significantly associated with high scores on mutuality in financial management scales. ($r = .44, .29$, $p < .001$, $p < .01$ respectively).

Inter-relationships

Pearson's correlations were completed for positive, negative and net scores for all three categories. Only 2 were statistically significant.

Spousal affect. Most couples projected both positive and negative affect in their TAT protocols, as would be expected in any close relationship (correlation between presence of positive and negative affect in the same record was .22, $p < .05$). Positive spousal affect, however, was higher than negative affect, in terms of group means.

Spouse versus parents. The inverse relation between affect towards spouse versus parents was shown in two TAT correlation coefficients; (a) negative "parents" scores and positive "spouse" scores ($r = .32$, $p < .01$) and (b) positive "parents" scores and negative "spouse" scores ($r = .21$, $p = .05$). These results are consistent with empirical findings on the inverse relation between closeness to spouse versus extended family.

Marital Patterns

Four patterns in marital interpersonal affect are briefly illustrated below. All TAT

responses are cited in the Appendix along with corresponding scores.

A Compatible Couple

Husband TAT: "spouse" = 4, "parents" = 0, "nonspouse" = 0, DAS = 116, Wife TAT: "spouse" = 4, "parents" = 3, "nonspouse" = 0, "other" = 1, DAS = 124. Both spouses had no negative affect in the "spouse" category. They chose a happy family for the blank card. Overall affect toward "spousal" figures were more positive than those directed toward "parental" and "nonspousal" figures.

Imbalance in Affect Between Partners

Husband TAT: "spouse" = -2 , "parents" = -1 , "nonspouse" = 3, DAS = 99, Wife TAT "spouse" = 2, "parents" = 1, "nonspouse" = 1, "other" = 1, DAS = 127. The husband's total affective scores represent a rare occurrence of higher "nonspouse" than "spouse" score. On the DAS, the couple's scores were 2 standard deviations apart. The husband's score was one SD below average while the wife's score was in the opposite direction. Responses to card 16 were similar. They consist of scenery, without people or affection. This mutual preference seemed to be good for the marriage, both being professionals at the top of their careers.

Marginal Marital Adjustment Difficulties

Husband TAT: "spouse" = -4, "parents" = 0, "nonspouse" = -1, "other" = 0, DAS = 97, Wife TAT: "spouse" = -2, "parents" = 2, "nonspouse" = 5, "other" = -1, DAS = 85. On the DAS, the couple scores were significantly below the normative married group's mean (the husband -1 SD and the wife close to -2 SD), which placed them in a marginal position. The husband seemed to be unreasonable, in response to 6GF. It linked well with the wife's fruitless attempts for communication, in response to card #4. The husband reflected a "stormy" temperament in his spousal themes, while the wife's spousal themes reflected helplessness. Affect towards "spousal" figures was predominantly negative for both and lower than other categories. Both were attached to the parent of the opposite sex with an element of guilt in the husband's case.

Serious Underlying Conjugal Difficulties.

Husband TAT: "spouse" = -2, "parents" = 0, "nonspouse" = -1 "other 1" = -1, "other 2" = -2, DAS = 101, Wife TAT: "spouse" = 0, "parents" = 1, "nonspouse" = 1, DAS = 110. All of the husband's scores indicated the poor quality of all interpersonal relations, with the spousal affect being the most negative. Feelings of "inadequacy" and "disappointment" added to the more explicit feelings of remorse, extramarital attractions and guilt associated with inappropriate incestuous curiosity. Throughout, the husband seemed to be more concerned with self than others. However, he did not feel good about himself either. A rational superficial layer of courtesy seemed to keep up a facade in the spousal imagery. The main figure in the wife's fantasy was her deceased father. She spoke passionately and consciously about him in 2 cards. Her response to card 13FM was the only one in the 60 cases that dealt with father and daughter figures, though dramatic and quite negative in content (suicide). As a couple, neither gave a positive loving response in a "spousal" interaction. Though both spouses reported marital adjustment within the average range for the normative married group, yet TAT responses revealed an underlying disposition which would place them in an "at risk" position.

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Appendix

Responses to TAT cards are summarised below. Interpersonal categories and attributed affective scores are found between brackets.

Compatible Couple

Husband

1) My impression is that he doesn't want to play the fiddle, his mother wants him to do. He'll do it anyway because his mother wants (parents: -1).

2) The girl is turning her back to the rural way of life, wondering whether she should or shouldn't (Q) possibly relation between her and him, mother and son I guess, it could be H & W, no, mother, son and daughter (Q: girl-mother) good relationship (parents: +1).

4) A bar room scene, she's trying to restrain him from making trouble, he isn't willing to be restrained (Q) possibly lovers, she doesn't want him to be in trouble (nonspouse: +2).

6GF) She's apprehensive to the guy with the pipe in his mouth, probably know each other but not too well yet (Q) nothing, honourable intention (Q) social, one function, no personal relation as love or marriage (nonspouse: -1).

10) Trust and affection based on a long relationship, either probably been married for a while or getting married, whatever (spouse: +2).

13FM) (long pause) This picture conveys sexual relationship without love or having lasting relationship. Neither feels good about each other, man feels guilty, woman doesn't care (nonspouse: -1).

16) "Card 10" keeps coming back, it's bringing the same story I said, the trust and love in a meaningful relationship between a man and a woman (spouse: +2).

Total TAT scores: "spouse" = 4, "parents" = 0, "nonspouse" = 0.

Wife

1) Little boy, I have to relate it to (son's name) was attracted then found it was difficult, he's wondering what he wants (other: +1).

2) A girl going to school, comes from a farm, she's trying to study she thinks about the farm a lot, her mother looking at her father strong, she's divided, leaving it behind to study (parents: +1).

4) A man and a woman, she tries to hold to him - he has a pin-up woman maybe a playboy - she wants to hold to him and he's trying to go not interested (Q) must be lovers don't think married (nonspouse: -1).

6GF) Old fashioned, she looks a bit weary, conscious, he's quite interested in her, what relationship I don't know, could be daughter and father, he seems to be the strong one, making a point (parents: +2).

10) 2 lovers I don't know whether husband & wife or not, seem to be happy together enjoy holding each other (Q) either married or not (spouse: +2; nonspouse: +2).

13FM) He's upset about something, she's lying there, could be dead for all I know, she's gone to bed ready for him, he can't face it, his mistress, he has a wife at home, single bed (nonspouse: -1).

16) A happy family, my family, my husband, me and our 2 children (spouse: +2).

Total TAT scores: "spouse" = 4, "parents" = 3, "nonspouse" = 0, "other" = 1.

Imbalance in Affect Between Partners

Husband

1) Me, as a child playing the violin, looking inside to see if there is enough strings, kind of happy and warm feelings, wondering if the violin I got of my father is a valuable instrument, some day I'll sell it for a lot of money, a sunny day (parents: +2).

2) A young woman that is leaving, on the outs with her parents, is out to university leaving the land, father in the field, mother with child again. She's having conflict whether staying or leaving for school (Q) parents resigned with what they have (parents: -2).

4) A man who wants to do something, to take action of some sort, his girl friend pleading with him to be more rational, about to charge off and vindicate, and she's trying to moderate his thought, no wedding ring (nonspouse: +2).

6GF) A woman who's in her 30's surprised by her father, she's been doing something, suddenly surprised by her father, reading something she's not supposed to be reading (parents: -1).

10) Two women, one comforting the other, she's not brave but there was a loss, a separation, the one on the right distressed and her neighbour, her husband or son left or died (Q) she's old enough, her husband (nonspouse: +1).

13FM) A harder one, he's committed murder, she's dead, he is upset she suddenly passed away (Q) husband and wife, can't know why she's died of something rather than murdering her, he feels capable, responsible (spouse: -2).

16) A tranquil, no people, sunny day on a beach, my favourite pastoral scene, cool old barn, old houses, no people, no animals (no score).

Total TAT scores: "spouse" = -2, "parents" = -1, "nonspouse" = 3.

Wife

1) An English school boy given a problem, interested in what he's doing, likes it, well cared for child (other: +1).

2) Family sequence, may or may not be related - girl, pregnant woman, a farmer and a horse, none of them is related to the other, except the woman to the man, it isn't likely she'd look at a man when she's tired if not his wife. The girl can't tell whether she's the daughter sprang from this milieu, no antagonism, each going his own way (spouse: +1).

4) Young woman and man, she's trying to get him to do something or not do something, a woman in semi negligee seems to be a posture - close relationship between the two, she likes him, she's persuading him (Q) lovers, not wearing a

ring, time to themselves (nonspouse: +2).

6GF) She's been doing something, he tells her something else, surprise she's interested, may or may not be related, old enough to be her father don't think they're married, he likes her, friendly gesture, she's been caught at a funny pose, she's surprised no hate no her face (parents: +1).

10) Comforting one another, probably man and wife, older, resemblance in eye-brow, comfort love no sexual, but it could be (Q) probably married certainly living together and mutually dependent (spouse: +1).

13FM) He's been asleep, I don't know one hand for guilt or fatigue, maybe he made love to her, sorry, she's relaxed not paying any attention to him, not married (nonspouse: -1).

16) Those weren't stimulating, trees, forest, abstract (no score).

Total TAT scores: "spouse" = 2, "parents" = 1, "nonspouse" = 1, "other" = 1.

Marginal Marital Adjustment Difficulties

Husband

1) A boy 13/14, thinking deeply, seems to be in trouble, depressed, looking at his violin as a source of inspiration, seems lonely and lost (other: -1).

2) The daughter coming back from school, her mother eagerly waiting for her, brother working hard, misery evident on her face, mourning (Q) father died (parents: +1).

4) Lady in the picture seems to be in love with the man, who's trying to hide his own feelings, for one reason or the other, the picture of the lady in the background seems to be the same lady (Q) lovers (nonspouse: -1).

6GF) Oh! The husband arriving late at home, to find his charming wife eagerly waiting for his arrival, when he screamed and yelled "why are you still awake? are you checking on me?" (spouse: -2).

10) Difficult, is it son or husband, I have to assume he's the son, who was lost, is back to his mother, the sign of sympathy on her face and of repentance on his (parents: -1).

13FM) A lady lying on bed, most probably sexually assaulted, man standing probably her husband, who has been frightened to see his wife in such an unpleasant situation and dead body, horrible (Q) not him who killed her (spouse: -2).

16) White, virgin, bright, future, happy landing of a peaceful house (other: +1).

Total TAT scores: "spouse" = -4, "parents" = 0, "nonspouse" = -1, "other" = 0.

Wife

1) He looks miserable, he doesn't know how to compose, very frustrated (other: -1).

2) A student in love with the man in the background, can't tell what is the relation with the woman (nonspouse: +2).

4) He's angry, she tries to talk to him, he wouldn't listen, a naked lady in background? a nice looking man, they must be married, if they were in love he would not have acted this way (Q) I think it's a picture (spouse: -1).

6GF) Not married, not lovers, maybe an old type of lovers, she said "is that so?" What is this? I think a table, he's talking and she's surprised, maybe friends (nonspouse: +1).

10) That is love, he's kissing her in her forehead, maybe his daughter or wife, he's closing his eyes and really loving (Q) lovers not married (parents: +2; nonspouse: +2).

13FM) He killed her? How can she have her breast that way? Are they married? He's dressed and she's sleeping, there is a chair, he slept while sitting, he killed her, they're married he killed her and he's guilty (spouse: -2).

16) A nice family, a man, wife and two children sitting in peace (spouse: +1).

Total TAT scores: "spouse" = -2, "parents" = 2, "nonspouse" = 5, "other" = -1.

Serious Underlying Conjugal Difficulties

Husband

1) A boy looking at a violin, very much, if he's come back from violin lesson, disappointing time, he reached cross-roads obviously looking at his own talents and efforts he puts in it, not a broken violin, my eyes (gesture) (other 1: -1).

2) The girl obviously comes from a rural background, in a certain moment of decision, whether or not she would lose a great deal in turning her back to the life she has had, whether or not it would be the right thing to do, she wants something better, this scenario will be there, she'll turn her back and it will be final, she can't turn back to it (Q) I can tell husband and wife the other two, the woman is pregnant (Q) she's the sister of the girl (spouse: +1).

4) Film stars those, a guy who's tired of the women he's with , trying to free himself, seek his chances elsewhere, disagreeing about something (Q) lovers, husband and wife in actuality, does it matter? Wait, the picture in the background, I don't know, maybe "a 7 year itch", he wants to move to greener pastures, does it matter, she looks so strangely, maybe they're married, doesn't look so distraught, certainly uses an argument (Q) he wouldn't go, he knows the drive, a guy has to have a more turnover, but if you're married you have a lively interaction, temporary thing in his life, his life can't be idealistic, going to listen to reason (spouse: -1).

6GF) Two very related emotionally, I suppose husband and wife could be brother and sister, he looks as if he said something a bit surprising, an extremely nothing, just talking about something, he made a suggestion or a point of view she finds surprising and disagreeable, he showed a side of himself she didn't think is there, they'll go to watch T.V. (Q) she ignored it and they carried on, pretended it had not happened (Q) he didn't like her mother, she's going to see her, he said he would not (spouse: -1).

10) I can't even tell if they are the opposite sex, I presume the hand is rather feminine, they recently - they're husband and wife or man and woman - had disagreement, the man who may have been the main cause, he's talking round his wife sort of trying to set things right by making promises it wouldn't come about (Q) it will be my own experience, I know anything can upset a woman, problem with their marriage, the man has to do this when he feels his wife thinks their emotional relation is threatened (spouse: -1).

13FM) Two situations (1) could be a young boy, in his teens, gone to his sister's room found her in this situation, 30 years ago you're not supposed to see your sister in this situation, he's covering his face symbolic of repentance, (2) a young guy who's been to bed with her, he found himself inadequate probably feels sorry with the whole thing, after a sex act he feels something they ought to be ashamed of, remorse, this feeling is improved by age and marriage or whatever the society accepts now (nonspouse: -1; other 2: -1).

16) Not easy, a boy looking up into the sky, he sees airplanes, German and British, he is 12/13 realizes there is a great deal that depends on the outcome, watching, not qualified to participate and help (other 1: -1).

Total TAT scores: "spouse" = -2, "parents" = 0, "nonspouse" = -1, "other 1" = -2, "other 2" = -1.

Wife

1) A little boy who the violin belongs to his father, who could play it very well, his father died and his mother sent him to learn it, he didn't have the same talent, he is looking at it regretfully, he wishes he had it (parents: +1).

2) Girl who was born of poor parents in the land, very clever, got the opportunity to go to college, unfortunately she had to go back to marry there, she's wondering whether the education was worthwhile (Q) girl, father and mother, she is not married yet, she's just thinking of the fact that she has to marry someone from the farm someday (parents: +1; spouse: -1).

4) Someone who has got involved with this beautiful prostitute, didn't intend to love her, but he did and she too, but he has got to go back to his family (nonspouse: -1).

6GF) Husband and wife having a discussion, look perfectly respectful (spouse: +1).

10) Two homosexuals making love to each other, two men (nonspouse: +2).

13FM) A father who came, found his daughter had an overdose of sleeping pills, found herself pregnant and died (parents: -2).

16) My father with his three grandchildren whom he had not seen, he loved children, used to write stories (parents: +1).

Total TAT scores: "spouse" = 0, "parents" = 1, "nonspouse" = 1.